

Erasmus Free Report – Hohenheim → Copenhagen

As a student of the EnvEuro program, I found it very easy to organise the second year of my studies involving my exchange to the University of Copenhagen. We had good support from both universities in regards to this, and once we arrived in Copenhagen we were treated to some nice introduction events to get us settled in to our new city.

Lodging

Myself and two other friends tried to apply for Student Accommodation through the university but unfortunately this was very difficult for us: After spending many hours looking at all the options for housing we had written lists of what we would choose if given the chance. On the day the offers came out we were ready with our computers to receive an email saying that we could log into the website. This email was supposed to come within a period of a few hours, and we finally started receiving it around two hours into this period. Added to this, we received it at different times, which showed us that the procedure was not equal, as some others would have received this email potentially hours before us. Once we had the email, we logged in to the site, only to be told we were number xx in the queue and had over an hour waiting time. Needless to say, we were not offered any of our chosen affordable accommodation, and were rather offered a small selection of overpriced dorms which (we found out after arriving) turned out to be unfinished, and people were basically moved into a building site. So we gave up on student accommodation and decided to look for our own through private sites.

One week before I arrived in Copenhagen, luckily (I thought) two of my friends were able to find a shared flat for two of us. Therefore we were very positive when I arrived and moved into this flat with one of them, and another student. However, we soon came to regret this decision, as shortly after attempting to register at the EU office (also a long process), our landlords told us that “actually no, you cannot stay here long term, contrary to what we told you, you can only stay the rest of the month”. Cue 2 months of sharing a room (actually a bed) with my best friend (also an EnvEuro) who was able to get a flat after a couple of months of sub-letting a shared room, during which time I was constantly on various social media sites as well as flat searching sites in an attempt to find a place. After moving to Copenhagen at the end of August, I was finally able to get a small room in a well located flat at the start of December. Here I stayed happily for the rest of my time in Copenhagen.

To put it shortly, finding housing in Copenhagen is not to be taken lightly, but I guess it is a common experience that almost everyone struggles through and can finally laugh about and share in the end 😊

Studies

I enjoyed the majority of my classes at the University of Copenhagen. The lecturers were in general very good, and often very motivated to instil their passion for learning into the students. This gave a great atmosphere and the casual relationship between students and lecturers made it very welcoming to ask questions during or after classes.

The courses had set block structures, which meant that you could have 4 hours of class in the morning, an hour of lunch break, and then another 4 hours of class in the afternoon. This was good for socialising, as it meant no matter what course you chose, your main lunch break would line up with those of friends or fellow students in other classes. For myself, all my classes were located in the Frederiksberg campus which was very central and allowed for easy movement between the classes.

The four courses I chose (Experimental Soil Analysis, Plant Nutrition and Soil Fertility, Soil and Water Pollution II: Experimental, and From Plants to Bioenergy) all had a good mix of theory and practical work, which meant that we were very often in the laboratory or the greenhouses. This was exactly what I wanted for my second year, especially as I was hoping (and did) to carry out quite a practical-based Master Thesis.

Daily life and free time

Copenhagen is quite an expensive city which we realised early on with housing prices. This high pricing is reflected in almost other aspects of the city as well, which meant that (relying purely on savings and scholarships) I was unable to go out to bars or restaurants as much as possible. However, there were ways to get around this, which included a "Community Kitchen Dinner" where a large group of us attended almost every Tuesday, in which volunteers cook a huge buffet based on food donated by supermarkets. This reduces food waste, was a very nice social event, and was only 20DKK/person (<3 Euros). Furthermore, almost all of our close group of friends got into dumpster diving, in which you check the bins behind the supermarkets for food that have been thrown out, for multiple reasons. These reasons include that the food is rotten or open, that there was no noticeable reason for the disposal, or simply that it was past its used by date, which is often not reflective of the quality of the food. It was very common to find e.g. a bag of 20 mandarins, in which one was crushed and therefore the whole bag was thrown out, although the other 19 were perfectly fine. This was a good way to save money, and was also social, as well as helping to reduce food wastage. As (mostly) students of Environmental Science, we were very concerned about this problem, knowing that (according to the FAO) >250kg food/person/year in Europe is lost or wasted, as well as that approximately one third of the food produced in the world for human consumption is lost or wasted.

In regards to going to bars, there are some relatively cheap "Bodegas" spread through the city which are not the nicest bars, but are suitable if wanting to drink beers somewhere not at home and also very traditionally Danish. As well as these the student bar "Studentarhuset" in the city centre and the Friday Bars of the various university campuses sell drinks cheaper than most other places and have very nice atmospheres for a night out. So we went to these often.

The Friday Bar at Frederiksberg Campus where we were studying is run by a different student group each week, and therefore we decided to run it one night as a coalition mostly between the EnvEuro students and those from Environmental Chemistry and Health as well as some others. This was a very fun experience, as we were behind the bar instead of in front of it, and was simply a lot of fun and very recommendable.



Figure 1: The plants I grew for my Master Thesis titled "Plant phosphorus availability of thermally treated sewage sludge".

Copenhagen was amazingly set-up for cycling, which meant I cycled to and from university, and to friends' houses, as well as to almost all other events. This was a nice way to keep a bit of exercise up, as well as being very quick. It also made it very accessible for us to do longer trips, such as to the south of Amager or north of Copenhagen, where we organised a few camping trips using the application "Shelter" which shows the various campsites and wooden shelters placed around the country which are often free to use and excellent for an overnight trip out of the city.

During single days off I would often take walks or bicycle rides through the city, around the lakes, in Christiania, or on the foreshore of the harbour. A friend and I also hired a kayak once from the "Kayak Bar" which we paddled around the canals and harbour for an hour for a new perspective on the city. Other cool events included the Distortion street music festival, as well as a ballet we attended which was very cheap due to booking student priced tickets early.

Another event we made sure to get to was the Roskilde music festival, which was 8 days long and to which a group of 10 of us attended. We volunteered through the association "klub10.dk" which meant that we had to do shifts during the festival but had our ticket for free. This was a really good insight into Danish culture and a lot of fun.

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Summary

In general, I am very glad I was able to take this opportunity to live and study in Copenhagen, as it is a very vibrant, cultural city full of life. Especially in contrast to on-campus living at Hohenheim, it was more difficult to organise easy meetings with friends, but due to nature of the city, there were often interesting events going on and a large variety of bars etc. that could be checked out easily, which was a nice contrast to the quiet, rural life I experienced in Hohenheim.

I can easily say that my worst experience was the long process of attempting to find accommodation, and this was only manageable due to a strong network of friends that were willing to offer help and places to stay during this time.

I have no single "best" experience as the entire year was full of nice new experiences for me, but living alone and having to organise almost all factors of my life individually was a very important learning opportunity for me.

I would definitely recommend to all students to make the most of any exchange opportunities they are presented, and I am very grateful for having received an ERASMUS grant to help me manage the year abroad, especially as Copenhagen was such an expensive city.